



CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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Testimony in Opposition to S.B. 461
"An Act Concerning Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs"
Before the Committee on Public Health
March 3, 2008

The Connecticut Catholic Conference, the public policy office of Connecticut's Catholic Bishops, would like to urge the members of the Public Health Committee to vote against S.B. 461 "An Act Concerning Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs".

The underlying goal of S.B. 461, to reduce teen pregnancy, is laudable and supported by the Catholic Conference. Risky sexual and social behavioral trends among teens, especially those leading to pregnancy, must be curtailed. Fortunately, teen pregnancy and birth rates within Connecticut have been strongly declining since the early 1990's. However, rates within several of our communities are still of great concern. The State spends over \$2.2 million a year on teen pregnancy prevention and should continue to address this critical problem.

S.B. 461 would direct funds to boards of education to use within their health education curriculum. Where the Conference primarily disagrees with the proponents of this legislation, is how to deliver that message within our school system, and what that primary message should be. The proponents of the bill appear to stress instructions on the mechanics of sexual activity through a method called "comprehensive sex education". The Conference supports programs that focus on a method called "abstinence education". The pro's and con's on these different approaches, although critical to achieving the goal of this legislation, is not my primary reason for appearing before you today.

The Conference's review of this legislation appears to raise many more critical and significant questions than it answers. Questions which are outside of the comprehensive versus abstinence education debate usually surround legislation like that before us today.

First, a claim and major assumption behind this bill is that teens are not being taught sexuality education within our public schools resulting in teen pregnancies. Where is the evidence for this claim? The mere fact that teen pregnancies are occurring does not mean sexuality education is not taking place. For years the State Department of Education has provided curriculum guidelines on teen health to local school districts. These guidelines were most recently revised in 2006 and include both abstinence and comprehensive sex education. How many districts are currently reviewing or planning to implement these new guidelines? Before the legislature allocates \$1 million dollars in state funding to enhance sexuality education to help reduce teen pregnancies, should it not confirm what is actually happening within our school districts, and not just assume the comments made by the proponents of the bill are in fact accurate.

Second, for what purpose are the funds to be used? Will the funds be used to assist local school districts in curriculum development relating to teen sexuality and pregnancy prevention? Or will the funds be used by school districts to hire outside businesses, such as Planned Parenthood, who is a primary supporter and organizer behind this legislation, to teach courses on sexuality? In this case no long term curricular changes take place, the district becomes dependent on outside providers, and the local board of education may end-up with weaker control and oversight of the curriculum. The Conference urges that the funds be limited to curriculum development relating to sexuality. The process of local curriculum development helps insure parental involvement in program content, helps build public support, and ensures the program will remain even if the grant does not.

Finally, why are the funds directed only to schools that have an already "demonstrated" record on teaching teen pregnancy prevention? It would appear to make more sense to focus new funding on districts that have not been providing teen pregnancy prevention and sexuality education.

Due to the questions raised above, additional concerns I am unable to address in the time allotted, and the multitude of other educational needs that must be addressed within our state, the Catholic Conference urges this committee not to support S.B. 461.

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Legislative Liaison